

THE FRIENDS OF JESUS

NO. 1552

A SERMON
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*"You are my friends, if you do whatsoever I command you."
John 15:14.*

OUR Lord Jesus Christ is beyond all comparison the best of friends, a friend in need, a friend indeed. "Friend!" said Socrates, "there is no friend!" But Socrates did not know our Lord Jesus or he would have added, "Except the Savior." In the heart of our Lord Jesus there burns such friendship towards us that all other forms of it are as dim candles to the sun. "Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friend."

An ordinary man has gone as far as he can when he has died for his friend, and yet he would have died anyhow, so that in dying for his friend he does but pay, somewhat beforehand, a debt which must inevitably be discharged a little further on. With Christ there was no necessity to die at all, and this therefore, places His love and His friendship by itself. He died who needed not to die, and died in agony when He might have lived in glory, never did man give such proof of friendship as this.

Let the friendship of our Lord to us stand as the model of our friendship to Him. It cannot be so in all respects because our situations and conditions are different, His must always be the love of the greater to the less, the love of the benefactor to one in need, the love of the Redeemer to those who are bought with a price, but setting those points aside, the whole tone and spirit of our Lord's friendship are such that the more closely we can imitate it the better. Such friendship as His should be reflected in a friendship most hearty and self-sacrificing on our part.

Our Lord does not, I think, in this text speak to us about His being our friend, but about our being His friends. He is "the friend of sinners," but sinners are not His friends till their hearts are changed. "You are my friends if you do whatsoever I command you," we are not His friends till then. His love to us is entirely of Himself, but friendship needs something from us. Friendship cannot be all on one side, one-sided friendship is more fitly called mercy, grace, or benevolence, friendship in its full sense is mutual. You may do all you will for a man and be perfectly benevolent, and yet he may make you no return, but friendship can only exist where there is a response.

Hence, we have not before us the question as to whether Christ loves us or not, as to whether Christ has pity on us or not, for in another part of Scripture we read of "His great love wherewith he loved us even when we were dead in trespasses and sins." He befriended us when we were enemies, but that is not our subject just now, the question is about our being friends to Him, and such we must be made if, indeed, there is to be any intimacy of mutual friendship. Friendship cannot be, as I have said before, all on one side, it is like a pair of scales, there must be something to balance on the other side, there must be a return of kindly feeling from the person loved. Jesus tells us here that if we are to be His friends we must do whatsoever He commands us and that out of love to Him.

Beloved, it is the highest honor in the world to be called the friend of Christ. There is no title surely that excels in dignity that which was worn by Abraham, who was called, "The friend of God." Lord Brooke was so delighted with the friendship of Sir Philip Sydney that he ordered to be engraved upon his tomb nothing but this, "Here lies the friend of Sir Philip Sydney." There is beauty in such a feeling, but yet it is a small matter compared with being able to say, "Here lives a friend of Christ."

O wondrous condescension that He should call me, "Friend". If I am indeed a true believer, not only is He *my* friend, without which I could have no hope here or hereafter, but He has in the boundings of

His grace been pleased to regard me as *His* friend, and write me down in the honored list of intimates who are permitted to speak familiarly with Him, as those do between whom there are no secrets, for their hearts are told out to Him while He hides nothing from them, but says, "If it were not so I would have told you."

Beloved, in what a light this sets obedience to Christ's commandments. I cannot help at this early moment in the sermon noting how the doctrine of our text transfigures obedience, and makes it the joy and glory of life. How precious it is, for it is a better seal to friendship than the possession of the largest gifts and influence. Christ does not say, "You are My friends, if you rise to a position of respectability among men or honor in the church." No, however poor you may be, and those to whom He spoke these words were very poor, He says, "You are my friends, if you do whatsoever I command you."

Obedience is better than wealth and better than rank. Jesus values His friends, not by what they have, or what they wear, but by what they *do*. The whole eleven apostles we may put down as having remarkable qualifications for their lifework, yet their Lord does not say, "You are My friends because I have endowed you with abilities for the apostleship." Even to these leaders of His sacramental host Jesus says plainly, "You are my friends, if you do whatsoever I command you."

That is the point by which your friendship shall be tested, "If you are obedient you are my friends." He says neither less nor more to any of us who this day aspire to the high dignity of being contained within the circle of His personal friendship. You must, my brethren, yield obedience to your Master and Lord, and be eager to do it, or you are not His bosom friends. This is the one essential, which grace alone can give us. Do we rebel against the request? Far from it, our joy and delight lie in bearing our Beloved's easy yoke.

I. Let us come to the subject more closely and notice first, that OUR LORD HIMSELF TELLS US WHAT OBEDIENCE HE REQUESTS from those who call themselves His friends.

True friends are eager to know what they can do to please the objects of their love, let us gladly hearken to what our adorable Lord now speaks to the select circle of His chosen. He asks of one and all obedience. None of us are exempted from doing His commandments. However lofty or however lowly our condition, we must obey, if our talent be but one, we must obey, and if we have ten, still we must obey. There can be no friendship with Christ unless we are willing, each one, to yield Him hearty, loyal service. Let it go round, then, to all of you upon whom the name of Jesus Christ is named, if enrolled among the friends of Jesus you must be careful about your own personal obedience to His blessed will. Forget not that even to the queen, standing on His right in gold of Ophir, the word is given, "He is your Lord, and worship you him."

It must be *active obedience*, notice that. "You are my friends, if you *do* whatsoever I command you." Some think it is quite sufficient if they avoid what He forbids. Abstinence from evil is a great part of righteousness, but it is not enough for friendship. If a man can say, "I am not a drunkard, I am not dishonest, I am not unchaste, I am not a violator of the Sabbath, I am not a liar," so far so good, but such righteousness does not exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, and they cannot enter the kingdom. It is well if you do not willfully transgress, but if you are to be Christ's friends there must be far more than this.

It would be a poor friendship which only said, "I am your friend, and to prove it, I don't insult you, I don't rob you, I don't speak evil of you." Surely there must be more positive evidence to certify friendship. The Lord Jesus Christ lays great stress upon positive duties, it is, "*if you do* whatsoever I command you." At the last day He will say, "I was an hungered, and you gave me meat: I was thirsty and you gave me drink." In that memorable twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew nothing is said about negative virtues, but positive actions are cited and dwelt upon in detail.

You know it is an old English saying, "He is my friend who grinds at my mill." That is to say, friendship shows itself in doing helpful acts, which prove sincerity. Fine words are mere wind, and go for nothing if not backed up with substantial deeds of kindness. Friendship cannot live on windy talk, it

needs the bread of matter of fact. The inspired Word says, "Show me a proof of your love; show it by doing whatsoever I command you."

We are clear, from the wording of the text, that the obedience Christ expects from us is *continuous*. He does not say, "If you sometimes do what I command you—if you do it on Sundays, for instance—if you do what I command you in your place of worship, that will suffice, but no, we are to abide in Him and keep His statutes even unto the end. I am not now preaching works as the way of salvation but as the evidences of fellowship, which is quite another thing. We must seek in every place, at all times, and under all circumstances, to do as Jesus bids us out of a cheerful spirit of reverence to Him. Such tender, loving subjection as a godly wife gives to her husband must be gladly yielded by us throughout life if we are His friends.

This obedience must also be *universal*. "You are my friends, if you do *whatsoever* I command you." No sooner is anything discovered to be the subject of a command than the man who is a true friend of Christ says, "I will do it," and he does it. He does not pick and choose which precept he will keep and which he will neglect, for this is self-will and not obedience. I have known some professors err greatly in this matter. They have been very strict over one point, and they have blamed everybody who did not come up to their strictness, talking as if that one duty fulfilled the whole law. Straining at gnats has been a very leading business with many, they have bought a choice assortment of strainers of the very finest net to get out all the gnats from their cup, but at the same time, on another day they have opened their mouths and swallowed a camel without a qualm.

This will not do: the test is, "If you do *whatsoever* I command you." I do not mean that little things are unimportant, far from it. If there be a gnat that Christ bids you strain at, strain it out with great diligence, do not let a midge escape you if He bids you remove it. The smallest command of Christ may often be the most important, and I will tell you why. Some things are great, evidently great, and for many reasons even a hypocritical professor will attend to them, but the test may lie in the minor points, which hypocrites do not take the trouble to notice, since no human tongue would praise them for so doing.

Here is the proof of your love. Will you do the smaller thing for Jesus as well as the more weighty matter? Too many say, "I do not see any use in it, I can be saved without it, there are a great many different opinions on the point," and so on. All this comes of evil, and is not consistent with the spirit of friendship with Christ, for love pleases even in trifles. Is it Christ's will? Is it plainly a precept of His Word? Then it is not yours to reason why, nor to raise any question. The reality of your subjection to your Lord and Master may hinge upon those seemingly insignificant points.

A domestic servant might place the breakfast on the table, and feel that she had done her duty, but if her mistress told her to place the salt at the corner, and she did not, she would be asked the cause of her neglect. Suppose she replied to her mistress, "I did not think it needful, I placed the breakfast before you, but a little salt was too trifling a matter for me to trouble about." Her mistress might answer, "But I told you to be sure and put out the saltcellar. Mind you do so tomorrow." Next morning there is no salt, and the maid says she did not see the use of setting it on the table. Her mistress is displeased, and tells her that her wish must be carried out. Will she not be a very foolish and vexatious girl if she refuses to do so, because she does not see the use of it? I think it is likely that the young woman would have to find another situation before long, for such conduct is very annoying.

So it is with those professors who say, "I have attended to the main things, and what I neglect is quite a minor matter." Such are not even good servants, friends they never can be. I beseech you, dear brethren, labor after universal obedience. "Whatsoever he says to you, do it." Only by an earnest endeavor to carry out the whole of His will can you live in happy fellowship with Him, and be indeed His friends.

Note well, that this obedience is to be rendered *as to Christ Himself*. Put the emphasis on the little word *I*, "You are my friends, if you do *whatsoever I* command you." We are to do these things because Jesus commands them. Does not the royal person of our Lord cast a very strong light upon the necessity

of obedience? When we refuse to obey, we refuse to do what the Lord Himself commands. When the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God and our Redeemer, is denied obedience it is treason. How can rebels against the King be His Majesty's friends? The precepts of Scripture are not the commandments of man nor the ordinances of angels, but the laws of Christ, and how dare we despise them. We are to act rightly because Jesus commands us, and we love to do His pleasure, there can be no friendship without this. Oh for grace to serve the Lord with gladness.

To close this first point, it appears that our Lord would have us obey Him *out of a friendly spirit*. Obedience to Christ as if we were forced to do it under pains and penalties would be of no worth as a proof of friendship, everyone can see that. He speaks not of slaves, but of friends, He would not have us perform duties from fear of punishment or love of reward, that which He can accept of His friends must be the fruit of love. His will must be our law because His person is our delight.

Some professors need to be whipped to their duties, they must hear stirring sermons, and attend exciting meetings, and live under pressure, but those who are Christ's friends need no spur but love. "The love of Christ constrains us." True hearts do what Jesus bids them without flogging and dogging, urging and forcing. Constrained virtue is spoiled in the making, as many a piece of earthenware is cracked in the baking. The wine of our obedience must flow freely from the ripe cluster of the soul's love, or it will not be fit for the royal cup. When duty becomes delight and precepts are as sweet as promises, then are we Christ's friends, and not till then.

II. Having thus set forth what kind of obedience Christ requests, I now notice, in the second place, that our Lord leads us to gather from this sentence that **THOSE WHO DO NOT OBEY HIM ARE NO FRIENDS OF HIS.**

He may yet look upon them and be their friend by changing their hearts and forgiving their sins, but as yet they are no friends of His, for a man who does not obey Christ *does not give the Savior His proper place*, and this is an unfriendly deed. If I have a friend I am very careful that if he has honor anywhere, he shall certainly have due respect from me. If he be my superior, I am anxious that he should not think me intrusive or imagine that I would take undue advantage of his kindness. He will be higher in my esteem than in the regard of anyone else.

He who is truly Christ's friend delights to honor Him as a great King, but he who will not yield Him His sovereign rights is a traitor and not a friend. Our Lord is the head over all things to His church, and this involves the joyful submission of the members, disobedience denies to Christ the dignity of that holy Headship which is His prerogative over all the members of His mystical body, and this is not the part of a true friend. How can you be His friend if you will not admit His rule? It is vain to boast that you trust His cross if you do not reverence His crown.

He who does not do His commandments cannot be Christ's friend, because *he is not of one mind with Christ*, that is evident. Can two walk together unless they be agreed? True friendship exists not between those who differ upon first principles, and there can be no points of agreement between Jesus Christ and the man who will not obey Him, for he in fact says, "Lord Jesus, Your pure and holy will is obnoxious to me, your sweet and gracious commands are a weariness to me." What friendship can be here? They are not of one mind, Christ is for holiness, this man is for sin; Christ is for spiritual-mindedness, this man is carnal-minded; Christ is for love, this man is for self; Christ is for glorifying the Father, this man is for honoring himself; how can there be any friendship when they are diametrically opposed in design, object, and spirit? It is not possible.

He who obeys not Christ cannot be Christ's friend, though he may profess to be. *He may be a very high and loud professor, and for that reason he may be all the more an enemy of the cross*, for when men see this man walking according to his own lusts they cry out, "You also were with Jesus of Nazareth," and they attribute all his faults to his religion, and straightway begin to blaspheme the name of Christ. Through the inconsistent conduct of our Lord's professed friends, His cause is more hindered than by anything else. Suppose you and I had some very intimate associate who was found drunk in the street, or committing burglary or theft, should we not feel disgraced by his conduct? When he was

brought before the magistrate would you like to have it said, “This person is the bosom friend of So-and-so”? Oh, you would cover your face and beg your neighbors never to mention it. For such a fellow to be known as your friend would compromise your name and character. We say this even weeping, that Jesus Christ’s name is compromised, and His honor is tarnished among men by many who wear the name of Christian without having the spirit of Christ, such cannot be His dear companions.

Alas for the wounds which Jesus has received in the house of His friends. When Caesar fell he was slain by the daggers of his friends! In trust he found treason. Those whose lives he had spared, spared not his life. Woe to those who under the garb of Christianity crucify the Lord afresh, and put Him to an open shame. Nothing burns Christ’s cheeks like a Judas kiss, and He has had many such.

Those that obey Him not cannot be owned by Jesus as His friends, for *that would dishonor Him indeed*. Time was—I know not how it is now—when if any man wanted to be made a count, or to get an honorable title, he had only to pay so much at Rome into the Papal exchequer, and he could be made a noble at once. The titles thus purchased were neither honorable to those who gave nor to those who received them. Whatever his pretended vicar may do, our Lord Himself sells no dignities. The title of “friends of Jesus” goes with a certain character, and cannot be otherwise obtained. Those are His friends who obey Him—“If you love me, keep my commandments.” He grants this patent of nobility to all believers who lovingly follow Him, but on His list of friends He enters none beside.

Do you not see that His honor requires this? Would you have our Lord stand up and say, “The drunkard is My friend”? Would you hear Him say, “That fraudulent bankrupt is My intimate companion”? Would you have Jesus claim friendly companionship with the vicious and profane? A man is known by his company, what would be thought of Jesus if His intimate associates were men of loose morals and unrighteous principles? To go among them for their good is one thing, to make them His friends is another. Where there is no kinship, no likeness, no point of agreement, the fair flower of friendship cannot take root. We may, therefore, read the text negatively, “You are not My friends, if you do not the things which I command you.”

III. Our third observation is, **THOSE WHO BEST OBEY CHRIST ARE ON THE BEST OF TERMS WITH HIM.**

“You are my friends,” He seems to say, “and live near to Me, enjoying practical personal friendship and daily intercourse with Me when you promptly obey.” Some of you know by personal experience, brothers and sisters, that you cannot walk in holy converse with Christ unless you keep His commandments. There is no feeling of communion between our souls and Christ when we are conscious of having done wrong and yet are not sorry for it. If we know that we have erred, as we often do, and our hearts break because we have grieved our Beloved, and we go and tell Him our grief, and confess our sin, we are still His friends, and He kisses away our tears, saying, “I know your weakness, I willingly blot out your offenses. There is no breach of friendship between us, I will manifest Myself to you still.”

When we know that we are wrong, and feel no softening of heart about it, then we cannot pray, we cannot speak with the Beloved, and we cannot walk with Him as His friends. Familiarity with Jesus ceases when we become familiar with known sin. If, again, knowing any act to be wrong we persevere in it, there cannot be any happy friendship between us and our Savior. If conscience has told you, dear brother, that such and such a thing ought to be given up, and you continue in it, the next time you are on your knees you will feel yourself greatly hampered, and when you sit down before your open Bible and hope to have communion with Christ as you have formerly enjoyed, you will find that He has withdrawn Himself, and will not be found by you.

Is there any wonder? If sin lies at the door how can the Lord smile on us? Secret sin will poison communion at the fountainhead. If there is a quarrel between you and Christ, and you are hugging to your bosom that which He abhors, how can you enjoy friendship? He tells you that sin is a viper that will kill you, but you reply, “It is a necklace of jewels,” and therefore, you put it about your neck. Do you wonder that because He loves you He is grieved at such mad behavior? Oh, do not thus bring injury upon yourself. Do not thus pour contempt upon His wise commands.

Some Christians will never get into full fellowship with Christ because they neglect to study His Word and search out what His will is. It ought to be a serious work with every Christian, especially in commencing his career, to find what is the will of his Lord on all subjects. Half the Christian people in the world are content to ask, "What is the rule of our church?" That is not the question, the point is, "What is the rule of Christ?" Some plead, "My father and mother before me did so." I sympathize in a measure with that feeling, filial reverence commands admiration, but yet in spiritual things we are to call no man "father," but make the Lord Jesus our Master and exemplar.

God has not placed your conscience in your mother's keeping, nor has He committed to your father the right or the power to stand responsible for you, every man must bear his own burden and render his own account. Search you the Scriptures for yourselves each one of you, and follow no rule but that which is inspired. Take your light directly from the sun. Let holy Scripture be your unquestioned rule of faith and practice, and if there is any point about which you are uncertain, I charge you by your loyalty to Christ, if you are His friends, try and find out what His will is, and when you once are sure upon that point never mind the human authorities or dignitaries that oppose His law.

Let there be no question, no hesitation, no delay. If He commands you, carry out His will though the gates of hell thunder at you. You are not His friends, or at any rate, you are not so His friends as to enjoy the friendship unless you resolutely seek to please Him in all things. The intimacy between you and Christ will be disturbed by sin, you cannot lean your head upon His bosom and say, "Lord, I know Your will, but I do not mean to do it." Could you look up into that dear face—that visage once so marred, now lovelier than heaven itself—and say, "My Lord, I love You, but I will not do Your will in every point"? By the very love He bears to you, He will chasten you for that rebellious spirit if you indulge in it. It is a horrible evil; holy eyes will not endure it. He is a jealous lover, and will not tolerate sin, which is His rival.

"You are my friends, if you do whatsoever I command you." Oh, beloved, see to this! Under all the crosses, and losses, and trials of life there is no comfort more desirable than the confidence that you have aimed at doing your Lord's will. If a man suffers for Christ's sake while steadily pursuing the course of holiness, he may rejoice in such suffering. Losses borne in the defense of the right and the true are gains. Jesus is never nearer His friends than when they bravely bear shame for His sake. If we get into trouble by our own folly we feel the smart at our very heart, but if we are wounded in our Lord's battles the scars are honorable. For His sake we may accept reproach, and bind it about us as a wreath of honor.

Jesus delights to be the Companion of those who are cast out by kinsfolk and acquaintances for the truth's sake and for fidelity to His cross. They may call the faithful one fanatic, and enthusiast, and all such ill-sounding names, but over these there is no need to fret, for the honor of being Christ's friend infinitely outweighs the world's opinion. When we follow the Lamb whithersoever He goes He is responsible for the results, we are not.

*"Though dark be my way, since He is my guide,
'Tis mine to obey, 'tis His to provide."*

The consequences which follow from our doing right belong to God. Abhor the theory that for the sake of a great good you may do a little wrong. I have heard men say, ay and Christian men too, "If I were strictly to follow my convictions I should have to leave a post of great usefulness, and therefore I remain where I am, and quiet my conscience as well as I can. I should lose opportunities of doing good, which I now possess, if I were to put in practice all I believe, and therefore I remain in a position which I could not justify on any other ground." Is this according to the mind of Jesus? Is this your kindness to your friend?

How many bow in the house of Rimmon, and hope that the Lord will have mercy upon His servants in this thing? We shall see if it will be so. We may not do evil that good may come. If I knew that to do

right would shake this whole island I should be bound to do it, God helping me, I would do it, And if I heard that a wrong act would apparently bless a whole nation, I have no right to do wrong on that account. No bribe of supposed usefulness should purchase our conscience. Right is right, and must always end in blessing, and wrong is wrong, and must always end in curse, though for a while it may wear the appearance of surpassing good.

Did not the devil lead our first parents astray by the suggestion that great benefit would arise out of their transgression? "Your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as gods," said the arch-deceiver. Would it not be a grand thing for men to grow unto gods? "Certainly," says Eve, "I would not lose the opportunity. The race which is yet to be would blame me if I did. I would not have men remain inferior creatures through my neglect." For the sake of the promised good she ventured upon evil.

Thousands of people sin because it seems so advantageous, so wise, so necessary, so sure to turn out well. Hear what Christ says—"You are my friends, if you do whatsoever I command you." If you do evil that good may come you cannot walk with Him, but if your heart is set towards His statutes you shall find Him loving you, and taking up His abode with you.

IV. Fourthly, by our text we are taught that THE MOST FRIENDLY ACTION A MAN CAN DO FOR JESUS IS TO OBEY HIM, "You are my friends, if you do whatsoever I command you."

Rich men have thought to do the most friendly act possible towards Christ by giving an immense sum to build a church, or to found almshouses or schools. If they are believers, and have done this thing as an act of obedience to Christ's law of stewardship, they have well done, and the more of such munificence the better, but where splendid benefactions are given out of ostentation, or from the idea that some merit will be gained by the consecration of a large amount of wealth, the whole business is unacceptable. If a man should give all the substance of his house for love it would utterly be condemned.

Jesus asks not lavish expenditure, but ourselves. He has made this the token of true love, "If you do whatsoever I command you." "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams." However much we are able to give we are bound to give it, and should give it cheerfully, but if we suppose that any amount of giving can stand as a substitute for personal obeying we are greatly mistaken. To bring our wealth and not to yield our hearts is to give the casket and steal the jewel. How dare we bring our sacrifice in a leprous hand? We must ourselves be cleansed in the atoning blood before we can be accepted, and our hearts must be changed before our offering can be pure in God's sight.

Others have imagined that they could show their friendliness to Christ by some remarkable action of self-mortification. Among Romanists, especially in the old time, it was believed that misery and merit went together, and so men tortured themselves that they might please God. They went for many a day without washing themselves or their clothes, and fancied that they thus acquired the odor of sanctity. I do not believe that Jesus thinks a man any more His friend because he is dirty. Some have put on a hair shirt, or have worn a chain girdle, which made raw wounds.

I do not think that the kind Lord Jesus counts these things to be friendly acts. Ask any humane person whether he would be gratified by knowing that a friend wore a hair shirt for his sake, and he would answer, "Pray let the poor creature wear whatever is most comfortable to him, and that will please me best." The loving Jesus takes no delight in pain and discomfort. The maceration of the body is no doctrine of His. John the Baptist might be an ascetic, but certainly Jesus was not, He came eating and drinking, a man among men. He did not come to demand the rigors of a hermitage or a monastery, else He had never been seen at feasts.

When we hear of the nuns of St. Ann sleeping bolt upright in their coffins, we take no particular satisfaction in their doing so, a kind heart would beg them to go to bed. I went over a monastery some time ago, and over each bed was a little cat-o'-nine tails, which I sincerely hope was used to the satisfaction of the possessor, but I did not copy the idea, and buy a couple for my sons, neither have I sent one to each of my special friends, for I should never ask them to flog themselves as a proof of friendship.

Our Lord cannot be gratified by self-inflicted, self-invented tortures. These things are will-worship, which is no worship. You may fast forty days if you like, but you will gain no merit by it. Jesus Christ has not demanded this as the gauge of friendship, neither will He regard us as His friends for this. He says, "You are my friends, if you do whatsoever I command you," but He does not command you to starve, or to wear sackcloth, or to shut yourselves up in a cell, pride invents these things, but grace teaches obedience.

Certain persons have thought it would be the noblest form of holy service to enter into brotherhoods and sisterhoods. They fancied that they would be Christ's friends indeed if they joined "the Society of Jesus." I have sometimes asked myself whether it might not be well to form a league of Christian men all banded together, to live alone for Jesus, and to give themselves up entirely and wholly to His work, but assuredly the formation of guilds, sisterhoods, or brotherhoods other than the great brotherhood of the church of God is a thing never contemplated in the New Testament, you shall find no foreshadowing of Franciscans and Dominicans there.

All godly women were sisters of mercy, and all Christlike men were of the Society of Jesus, but of monastic and conventual vows we read nothing. That which is not commanded in Scripture is superstition. We are to worship God according to *His* will, not according to our will, and though I were to consecrate myself entirely to what Papists called the religious life, and get away from the associations of ordinary men, and try to spend my whole time in lonely contemplations, yet there would be nothing in it, because the Lord Jesus never required it at my hands. The thing that He does ask for is that we will do whatsoever He commands us.

Why is it that people try to do something which He never did command? A schoolmaster will suffer me to appeal to him on this point. If he said to a boy in the school, "Now is the time for you to take your slate and attend to arithmetic," and the boy instead fetched his copy-book, would he not ask if he had understood him? If after a few minutes he finds the boy writing does he say, "You have written that line very well?" Not at all. It is small matter whether the writing be well or ill done, for to be writing at all when he was told to be ciphering is a gross act of insubordination.

So is it with you and me. We may do something else, and do it splendidly well and other people may say, "What a pious man he is," but if we do not the Lord's will we shall not be His friends. We may wear a piece of leather for a sandal, and brown serge for a garment, and forswear boots and coats, but there is no grace in apparel, excellence lies in doing what Christ has commanded.

Some think it a very friendly act towards Christ to attend many religious services in a consecrated building. They are at matins, and vespers, and feasts and fasts without number. Some of us prefer to have our religious services each day in our own homes, and it will be a dreadful thing when family prayer is given up for public services, but a number of people think little of family devotion, they must needs repair to the parish church or to some other temple made with hands, but let no man dream that Jesus is thus made our friend.

We are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is, it is well to be found meeting with God's people as often as we can, but still you may multiply your sacraments and increase your ceremonies, and you may attend to this service, and to the other service, until your heart is worn away with grinding at the mill of outward religion. You are Christ's friends, if you do whatsoever He commands you, that is a better test than early communion or daily mass.

It comes to this, dear friends, that we must steadily, carefully, persistently, cheerfully do the will of God from the heart in daily life, from the first waking moment till our eyes are closed. Say concerning everything, "What would Jesus have me do about this? What is the teaching of Christ as to this?" "Whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever you do, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks unto God and the Father by him."

You may be a domestic servant, and never be able to give a pound to church work, but you are Jesus' friend if you do whatsoever He commands you, you may be a housewife and not able to do anything outside of the little family which requires all your attention, but if you are fulfilling your duty

to your children, doing that which Christ commands you, you are among the friends of Jesus. You may be only a plain working man, or a tradesman with a small shop, nobody hears of your name, but if you set the example of honesty, uprightness, and piety, doing all things as to Christ because He has saved you, He will call you His friend. What patent of nobility can equal this? Friendship with Christ is worth a thousand dukedoms.

The practical outcome of it all is this, examine every question as to duty by the light of this one inquiry—"Will this be a friendly action to Christ? If I do this shall I act as Christ's friend? Will my conduct honor Him? Then I am glad. If it will dishonor Him I will have nothing to do with it." Set each distinct action, as far as you are able, in the scales, and let this be the weight—is it a friendly action towards your Redeemer?

I wish that we all lived as if Jesus were always present, as if we could see His wounds, and gaze into His lovely countenance. Suppose that tomorrow you are brought into temptation by being asked to do something questionable, decide it this way, if Jesus could come in at that moment and show you His hands and His feet, how would you act in His sight? Behave as you would act under the realized presence of the Well-beloved. You would not do anything unkind to Him, would you? Certainly you would not do anything to grieve Him if you saw Him before your eyes. Well, keep Him always before you. The psalmist cried, "I have set the Lord always before me."

You will want much of the Holy Spirit's anointing to do this. May God give it to you. Live, dear friends, as if Christ would come at once and detect you in the very act. Do that which you would not be ashamed of if the next instant you should see the Lord sitting on the throne of His glory, and calling you before His bar. Thus living, you shall delight yourself in the abundance of peace—

*"So shall your walk be close with God,
Calm and serene your frame;
So purer light shall mark the road
That leads you to the Lamb."*

Obedience will gladden you with the blissful presence of your Lord, and in that presence you shall find fullness of joy. You shall be the envied of all wise men, for you shall be the beloved of the Lord, and your pathway, if it be not always smooth, shall be always safe, for Jesus never leaves His friend, and He will never leave you, but He will keep you even to the end. May this be my happy case and yours. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—JOHN 19

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—915, 119 (SONG 2), 646

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